

# EU News Bulletin

The latest news, funding and events from the EU for local and regional government

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Irish Regions Office



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## FUNDING

### **Broadband in Rural Areas**

The European Commission has launched a Call for Exhibits for a forthcoming conference on, "Bridging the Broadband Gap: Benefits of Broadband for Rural Areas and Less Developed Regions," which takes place in Brussels on the 14-15 May 2007. The Commission is inviting applications from public authorities that undertook projects to support rural and regional development through the use of broadband. Up to 40 projects will be selected as good practices from those submitted, and will be invited to exhibit at the event and share their experiences with the conference participants. Three of the best projects will also be selected for the European Broadband Project Award for 2007. All projects must be submitted via the online form by 2 March 2007. *Further details at:* [http://ec.europa.eu/information\\_society/events/broadband\\_gap\\_2007/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/events/broadband_gap_2007/index_en.htm)

### **Intelligent Energy Europe**

The first call for proposals under the new Intelligent Energy Europe (IEE) programme is expected in April 2007. The new IEE II programme will have three sub-programmes, focusing on three priority themes: SAVE (energy efficiency), ALTENER (renewable energy) and STEER (energy and transport). Support will be provided for activities aimed at promoting market transformations, new skills (including training in the implementation of the EU Buildings Directive) and behavioral change. Support will also be provided for new local or regional energy agencies. The budget for IEE II is €730 million (up from €250 million in 2000-06) and EU funding of up to 75% is available (up from 50% in 2000-2006). The expected deadline for proposals is July 2007. *Further details at:* [http://ec.europa.eu/energy/intelligent/index\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/energy/intelligent/index_en.html)

### **Sustainable Urban Transport**

The European Commission has published a call for proposals under the new CIVITAS Plus initiative 2007-2013. CIVITAS helps cities to achieve more sustainable, clean and energy efficient urban transport systems. The new CIVITAS call builds on the success and lessons learnt from CIVITAS I and CIVITAS II and is open to proposals that could include local consortia from three "leading cities" and local consortia from up to two "learning cities". Each city should be located in a different country. "Leading cities" will implement integrated packages of policy and technology measures and "Learning cities" will learn from the leading cities and test and demonstrate small elements of their proposals. The current call specifically targets small and medium sized cities. The deadline for applications is 28 June 2007. *Further details at:* <http://www.civitas-initiative.org/call.phtml?id=699&lamp:lan=en>

### **Anti-discrimination**

The European Commission has published a call for proposals under the Community Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity (PROGRESS). This call aims to raise awareness, disseminate information and promote debate on the key challenges and policy issues in relation to discrimination and the mainstreaming of anti-discrimination in all Community policies, including among the social partners, NGOs and other stakeholders. The total budget is €4.0 million and up to 3 projects per country can be financed, to a maximum of €400,000. Community co-financing of up to 80% is possible. The call is open to national authorities or bodies nominated to act on their behalf. *Further details at:* [http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/calls/2007/vp\\_2007\\_006/appguide\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/calls/2007/vp_2007_006/appguide_en.pdf)

## NEWS & POLICY

### **Consultation on European Territorial Co-operation in the Atlantic Area**

The Border, Midland and Western (BMW) Regional Assembly, as national contact point in Ireland, in conjunction with its partners, the Norte region of Portugal and the Department of Finance, Ireland, have prepared a draft Atlantic Area Territorial Cooperation Programme 2007-13, which is now available for public consultation. The new programme will provide Structural Funds support to cooperation projects in the Atlantic Area (all Ireland and part of the UK, France, Portugal and Spain). It will specifically focus on the following priority areas: innovation; environment and risk prevention; accessibility; sustainable urban development; and maritime issues. The total budget for the programme is approximately €160 million. The programme partners have also prepared a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) report on the programme, as required under European law. The SEA report identifies, describes and evaluates the likely impact of the programme on the environment. The deadline for receipt of comments on the draft programme is 4.00pm on Wednesday 28 February 2007. Further details at: [http://www.bmwassembly.ie/interreg/Intereg\\_4b.htm](http://www.bmwassembly.ie/interreg/Intereg_4b.htm)

### **Consultation on Ireland-Northern Ireland-Scotland Cooperation Programme**

The Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), which is responsible for the management of the new territorial cooperation programme between Northern Ireland, the border counties of Ireland and parts of western Scotland, has published the proposed Operational Programme for public consultation. The new programme will run from 2007-2013 and will have a budget of €256 million (€192 million from the EU and national contributions of €64 million). It follows on from the previous cross-border Interreg IIIA programme, which provided more than €182 million in funding for Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland. The new programme focuses on two distinct priority areas that include diversifying and developing the economy by encouraging innovation and competitiveness and supporting

activities that promote cross-border co-operation. Within the two priority areas, there will be a focus on: supporting new and existing businesses, promoting innovation, encouraging competitiveness and creating a more sustainable economic base; supporting the development of tourism products that will attract domestic and overseas visitors; collaborative approaches that will promote innovative ways of addressing specific cross-border problems, delivering services within border areas and promoting sustainable communities; and support for a number of cross-border infrastructure projects in the areas of telecommunications, transport, energy, waste and utilities and the environment. The consultation document sets out the rationale for the new programme, its priorities and areas of intervention along with the proposed implementation provisions. The consultation runs until Monday 30 April 2007. Further details at: <http://www.seupb.eu/consultation/interreg.htm>

### **EU LIFE+ Programme Delayed**

The launch of the new EU LIFE+ programme for 2007-13 has been postponed due to the European Parliament's opposition to the proposed decentralised management of the programme. In a departure from previous programmes, the European Commission has proposed that under the new programme, Member States would be allocated a specific national budget, which would be managed by a national agency. This decentralised management was a key element of the Commission's proposal and has already been endorsed by the Member States. However, the European Parliament is opposed to this approach, as it believes this would be a move towards renationalisation of EU funding for the environment. Parliament's opposition has now triggered a "conciliation" process, aimed at finding agreement on how the programme can proceed. It is expected, however, that the programme will be finally adopted by September 2007, with the first calls for proposals launched before the end of 2007. Until the conciliation procedure is concluded, however, details of the programme management and the calls remain uncertain. Up-to-date information on LIFE+ is available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/news/futureoflife.htm>

### **Freeze on Rural Development Funding**

On February 14, the European Parliament rejected for the second time the European Commission's proposals on voluntary modulation. As part of the deal reached in December 2005 on the EU budget for 2007-2013, the budget originally proposed by the European Commission for rural development budget was reduced. To compensate for this, it was agreed that Member States be given the flexibility to voluntary transfer up to 20% of direct payments (the first pillar of the Common Agricultural Policy or CAP) to rural development projects (the second pillar of the CAP), in addition to the existing 5% compulsory modulation. However, members of the European Parliament have rejected this proposal, which they consider to be anti-competitive and a threat to the livelihoods of European farmers. To give weight to their non-binding opinion (i.e. Parliament cannot block the proposals), MEPs have frozen a part of the budget intended to finance the new rural development programmes, which could delay the adoption of these programmes. In the meantime, the Parliament is now seeking new proposals from the Commission, which take account of its concerns in relation to voluntary modulation. The Commission and the German EU Presidency are hoping that a solution will be found before the end of February. In view of the fact that voluntary modulation will also be one of the questions that the Agricultural Commissioner will table at the review of the CAP in 2008, one of the possible options for solving the crisis is to strengthen the Parliament's participation in this process. Further details at: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress\\_page/032-12637-317-11-46-904-20061113IPR12518-13-11-2006-2006-false/default\\_en.htm](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/032-12637-317-11-46-904-20061113IPR12518-13-11-2006-2006-false/default_en.htm)

### **Continued GDP Growth in Irish Regions**

The Southern & Eastern Region in Ireland had a GDP of 157% of the EU27 average in 2004, ranking 13<sup>th</sup> out of the EU's 268 NUTS II regions. This was up from 149.2% of the EU25 average in 2003 (part of the increase in 2004 is, therefore, attributable to the overall lowering of the average due to the inclusion of Romania and Bulgaria). The Border, Midland & Western Region had a GDP of 100.1%, just over the EU27 average, in 2004, and up from 92.5% of the EU25 average in 2003. The overall GDP figure for Ireland in 2004 was

141.4% of the EU27 average, up from 134.1 of the EU25 average in 2003. The three leading regions in the ranking of regional GDP per inhabitant in 2004 were Inner London (303% of the average), the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg (251%) and the Brussels region (248%). The fifteen lowest regions in the ranking were all in Bulgaria, Poland and Romania, with the lowest figures recorded in Nord-Est in Romania (24% of the average). *Further details at:* <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=STAT/07/23&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

### **European Parliament Delegation to Visit Ireland**

A delegation of MEP's from the European Parliament's Regional Development (REGI) committee is due to visit Ireland from 10-12 September 2007. The REGI committee has responsibility for assessing proposals in relation to the Structural Funds and EU regional policy generally, as well as relations with the Committee of the Regions and local and regional authorities. The members of the committee include Marian Harkin, Jim Higgins and Barbara de Brun from Northern Ireland. While the programme for the visit to Ireland has yet to be finalised, it is expected that MEP's will meet with representatives of central government and sub-national authorities, as well as visiting a number of projects and initiatives funded under the Structural Funds. *Further details from the Irish Regions Office.*

### **Tougher Laws on the Environment**

On February 9, the European Commission presented proposals for a new Directive to oblige Member States to treat serious offences against the environment as criminal acts and to ensure effective sanctions. The draft Directive proposes minimum sanctions for environmental crimes across the Member States. The Directive will cover a list of serious environmental crimes, including: the unlawful treatment, transport, export or import of waste, including hazardous waste; the unlawful trade in endangered species; the unlawful trade in or use of ozone-depleting substances; and the unlawful operation of a plant in which a dangerous activity is carried out or in which dangerous substances or preparations are stored or used. The

majority of the offences are conditional on whether or not they cause or are likely to cause serious harm to persons or the environment. Under the new proposals, Member States will be required to ensure that offences in these areas are punishable by a maximum of at least 5 years imprisonment and fines for companies of at least €750,000. In addition, the Directive foresees supplementary or alternative sanctions, such as the obligation to clean up/reinstate the environment or the possibility of stopping businesses from operating. Member States will have 18 months after its adoption to implement the Directive and send their implementing legislation to the Commission. *Further details at:* <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/crime/index.htm>

### **Structural Funds Programmes Delayed**

Speaking in the European Parliament on February 1, EU Regional Policy Commissioner Danuta Hubner indicated that many of the new Structural Funds programmes would not now be approved until late 2007 or early 2008. The Commissioner stated that while draft National Strategic Reference Frameworks have been received from all Member States, only 48 of the expected 450 Operational Programmes have been officially submitted to the Commission. Approval of programmes for Ireland is making good progress, however, and it is expected that they could now be launched by the summer.

The Commissioner also made reference to Member States application of the partnership principle. The new legal framework provides more possibilities to delegate responsibilities to sub-national authorities, which offers the prospect of a wider involvement of stakeholders in programme preparation and implementation. The Commissioner noted the reluctance of Member States to use this mechanism but insisted she would "be seeking to ensure that this democratisation of the programming process is fully exploited." Finally, the Commissioner indicated that the Commission's Annual Progress Report on the Lisbon process, to be presented at the forthcoming Spring Council and would highlight the linking of the Structural Funds to the Jobs and Growth Agenda (for 2007-13, up to 70% of Structural Funds must be earmarked for "Lisbon" type actions). She confirmed that there has been a high degree of cooperation between those responsible for coordinating the implementation of the National Reform

Programmes (NRP) and those responsible for the preparation of the NSRFs. She also confirmed that the authorities in the Member States had clearly decided to put the emphasis on the promotion of clusters of activities covering innovation, RTD and the knowledge economy. *Further details from the Irish Regions Office*

### **Irish are EU's Biggest Waste Producers**

Ireland produced 753kg of municipal waste per inhabitant in 2004, the highest level in the EU. The EU average for 2004 was just over 500kg of municipal waste per inhabitant, but this ranged from 753kg in Ireland and 739kg in Cyprus to 256kg in Poland and 274kg in Slovakia. Ireland also had the third highest amount of waste per inhabitant going to landfill (451kg), after Cyprus (659kg) and Malta (569kg). The least waste per inhabitant was landfilled in the Netherlands (11 kg), Denmark (31 kg), Sweden (42 kg) and Belgium (47 kg). The EU27 average figure was 243 kg. Municipal waste consists of waste collected by or on behalf of local authorities and disposed of through the waste management system. It also includes estimates of similar waste generated in areas not covered by the municipal waste collection system. This information, plus a range of other statistics, is available in the Eurostat Yearbook 2006/2007. *Further details at:* <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat>

### **Outlook for Agriculture and Rural Areas to 2020**

A new European Commission study, 'Scenar 2020 – Scenario study on agriculture and the rural world,' assesses potential changes in agriculture and rural areas between now and 2020. The study identifies the impact of the main driving forces on agriculture and rural areas, such as population, economic change, agricultural markets and environmental conditions as well as the Common Agricultural Policy. It also identifies major opportunities and challenges for agriculture and rural areas, looking in particular at the impact of developments in the renewable energy sector, new opportunities on world markets as well as structural change and changing environmental conditions in parts of the EU. *The study can be found at:* [http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/publications/scenar2020/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/publications/scenar2020/index_en.htm)

## EVENTS

### 20 April 2007, Naas (Ireland)

The 8<sup>th</sup> annual conference of the Southern & Eastern Regional Assembly will focus on the theme, "Regional Governance." Further details will be provided in the coming weeks, or contact Breda White or Yvonne Cooney at the Assembly. *Further details at: [www.seregassembly.ie](http://www.seregassembly.ie) or Tel: +353 (0)51 860700.*

### 7-10 May 2007, Milan (Italy)

The European Wind Energy Conference will discuss issues concerning European and global wind markets, in technical and business areas, from resource assessment and innovative turbine design to market and policy developments. The conference will draw on leading experience from all over Europe and will include over 200 speakers in 40 separate business, technical and workshop sessions. *Further details at: <http://www.ewec2007.info>*

### 14 -15 May 2007, Brussels

The European Commission is organising a major conference and exhibition on, "Bridging the Broadband Gap: Benefits of Broadband for Rural Areas and Less Developed Regions." The aim of this event is to investigate how the strategic use of Information & Communication Technologies (ICTs) can support regional and local development, ease infrastructure and geographical handicaps, and make these areas more attractive to business and individuals alike. A call for exhibits is now open until March 2 (see above). *Further details at: [http://ec.europa.eu/information\\_society/events/broadband\\_gap\\_2007/index\\_e.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/events/broadband_gap_2007/index_e.htm)*

### 5-6 June 2007, Brussels

The programme for the 14th edition of Employment Week has just been published by the European Commission. The two-day conference and exhibition provides an opportunity for practitioners and European decision-makers to meet and discuss

the latest policies and trends in European employment. Focusing on 'Working Europe – creating more and better jobs', the conference programme will include two main streams: in the workplace and in the labour market. *Further details at: [www.employmentweek.com](http://www.employmentweek.com)*

### 16-22 Sept 2007

European Mobility Week (EMW) is an awareness-raising campaign which promotes sustainable transport by encouraging cycling, walking, public transport and car-pooling. The initiative was launched in 2002 as an extension of the "In Town, Without My Car!" Campaign and runs from 16 to 22 September every year. The theme for 2007 is "Streets for People". Towns or cities wishing to participate are required to organise a week of activities based on this theme, implement at least one permanent measure, and organise the "In Town, Without My Car!" day. *Further details at: <http://www.mobilityweek-europe.org/>*

## NETWORKS

### Rural INNOVA

Rural INNOVA is a network of 15 European regions which aims to promote the innovative development of rural areas through the transfer of experiences and the exchange of good practices. It is supported by the European Union under the Interreg III C programme. On 12 March 2007, the Network will organise its final dissemination conference in Brussels on the topic, "What are Europe's aims for the future of rural areas?" The conference will address the following questions: What prospects for interregional cooperation for rural areas for the period 2007-2013? And what will be the future of rural development after the European budget reform in 2009? *Further details at: [http://www.rural-innova.org/uk/pageseditos.asp?IDPAG E=54&sX\\_Menu\\_selectedID=m2\\_BE2\\_C70FC](http://www.rural-innova.org/uk/pageseditos.asp?IDPAG E=54&sX_Menu_selectedID=m2_BE2_C70FC)*

## PUBLICATIONS

### European Civil Service Directory

Anyone seeking to identify or contact a particular staff member within the European Commission can now consult a new website which provides information on the European civil service. The key feature of the website is its staff directory, which enables users to search the organisational charts of all Commission departments by name or position. Information is also provided on how the Commission works and what its staff do, as well as a guide to applying for work experience and careers in the service. The site can be found at: [http://ec.europa.eu/civil\\_service/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/civil_service/index_en.htm)

### Facts on EU Local & Regional Authorities

A new factsheet comparing local and regional structures across Europe has been published by the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR). The factsheet, entitled 'The state of Europe's local and regional government in 2005', provides comparative information and indicators on Europe's local and regional structures, Structural and Cohesion Funds, economic activity, public sector finances and town twinning. The document can be viewed at: [www.ccre.org/publications\\_en.htm](http://www.ccre.org/publications_en.htm)

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